

Clean Water Starts with Us

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WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT IN IOWA

DNR ♦ DSC ♦ NRCS

SPRING 2009

Planning, partnerships help town's drinking water

Pheasants, nature lovers also benefit from new habitat

Thanks to some careful planning and collaboration, the residents of Remsen can enjoy safe drinking water and local pheasants can find cover.

A major source water protection project has resulted in a comprehensive plan to protect the town's drinking water by using a number of practices, including planting native grasses in priority areas.

Those grasses will reduce the amount of nitrates entering groundwater and one of the town's wells, and give shelter to wildlife, especially pheasants.

While the DNR contacted Remsen about creating a source water project, it quickly became a local effort, led by a source water community planning team and a supporting cast of federal, state and local partners (see sidebar on page 4).

The planning team worked with the DNR's Source Water Protection Program and Contaminat-



Native grasses planted around the Remsen well field will help protect drinking water and provide habitat for pheasants.

ed Sites Section to conduct a groundwater assessment to identify areas of concern.

USDA-NRCS and USDA-Agricultural Research Service assisted in identifying nitrate-reducing practices for those targeted areas.

With this information and 14 months of monitoring data from the DNR, the planning team developed a comprehensive source water protection plan that identified problems in the area around the wellhead and offered solutions to

reduce nitrate in the well water.

The plan – currently being put into action – calls for the city to purchase cropland near the well and convert it to native grasses.

The deep-rooted prairie grasses use the nitrates in the soil before it can seep into groundwater, reducing nitrate levels in the drinking water supply.

"Assessing the groundwater first to provide information to the community planning team was the key to getting this project started in the right direction.

"This long-term source water plan has made it much easier to gather needed partners and implement a successful project," said Becky Ohrtman, who coordinates the DNR's Source Water Protection Program.

Pheasants Forever stepped in to provide funds for seeding and maintaining the area's native plants. The Remsen Fire Department will keep weeds in

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clean water
starts with you.

Find grant applications, assistance and more at:

<http://watershed.iowadnr.gov> | www.iowaagriculture.gov/soilConservation.asp

Absentee landowners: Ten things to keep in mind

A growing number of Iowa acres are owned by folks who don't live on the farm – maybe across town or across the country. Reaching these landowners requires different and innovative public outreach techniques. As you work with absentee landowners, consider:

1. 70 percent of absentee landowners have at least some college education.
2. 63 percent have little, if any, agricultural background.
3. Two-thirds have never had land enrolled in a conservation program.
4. Recreation or wildlife interests influence their decision making a great deal.
5. A majority rent their land to a local farmer instead of a family member or friend.
6. Most feel comfortable encouraging their operator to use certain conservation practices.
7. A majority prefers to receive information by mail or through one-on-one contacts.
8. They have very little knowledge about conservation agencies.
9. A majority do not rely on their land as an important source of income.
10. Absentee landowners indicate that wildlife, soil and water are their three top areas of interest related to their land.

This list was based on a survey of 2,000 absentee landowners in Wisconsin, Michigan and New York, and is courtesy of Agren, Inc.

Tips from the field: absentee landowners

We made an effort to keep all absentee landowners informed through a mailing list, plus phone calls. This included an early mailing of a conservation plan, which included potential needed practices that had application potential for their land.

Our response was good with actual conservation practice application equal to resident owners. The operator also plays an important role in the communication process.

- Stan Simmons, watershed project coordinator, Lake Darling

Iowa Learning Farm launches new watershed program

A new component with the Iowa Learning Farm is designed to improve water quality through development of agricultural watershed groups in Iowa.

The project, "Leadership and Performance Driven Watershed Management," funded through the USDA-CSREES Integrated Water Quality Program, builds on neighbor relationships and seeks environmentally sound and economically practical solutions to nonpoint source pollution concerns.

The project is implemented through a partnership of university and state agencies and local farmers. Iowa State University professors Lois Wright Morton and Matt Helmers lead the project.

"Iowa has highly skilled and dedicated farmers with a great deal of interest in solving loss of sediment, phosphorus and nitrogen into our water bodies," said Wright Morton. "This project will give them additional tools and build support networks to better protect our waters."

One of the project goals is to build local capacity for watershed management. Farmers and technical specialists within the watershed groups will set priorities and use performance-based strategies that allow farmers to address their own environmental goals more effectively.

The project also strengthens partnerships among agency technical providers, educators and farmers in each watershed.

Project Coordinator Jamie Benning will recruit watershed leaders and oversee the development of the watershed groups.

In addition to in-place best management practices, project achievement will be monitored by performance measurements such as the late-season Cornstalk Nitrate Test, the Soil Conditioning Index and the Iowa Phosphorus Index.

These tests estimate reductions of phosphorus and nitrogen delivery to surface waters, improvement in soil condition, and reduced erosion.

For more information about this project contact Jamie Benning at (515) 294-6038 or benning@iastate.edu.

-Carol Brown, ILF

Projects reduce sediment delivery in '08

About 19,000 tons of soil are staying put on the land and out of Iowa streams and lakes, thanks to conservation practices installed in fiscal year 2008.

Put that amount of soil in dump trucks, and you'd have a line of trucks almost six miles long. The numbers indicate that conservation practices on agricultural and urban land are effectively reducing pollutants reaching Iowa's water.

Of the projects DNR helps fund, 42 reported on practices installed during federal fiscal year (FFY) 2008. From Oct. 1, 2007 to Sept. 30, 2008, those conservation practices had the following results:

- Reduced sediment reaching streams and lakes by at least 18,860 tons per year.
- Reduced phosphorus reaching streams and lakes by at least 24,585 pounds per year.

- Reduced nitrogen reaching streams and lakes by at least 27,992 pounds per year.

These conservation practices will continue to reduce pollutants at the same rate if properly maintained.

The numbers apply only to practices installed in 2008 through DNR-funded watershed projects and do not reflect the total effects of all conservation practices in the state. IDALS-DSC helped fund 40 of these projects.

The DNR has tracked annual sediment and phosphorus load reductions since 2004.

Practices installed through DNR watershed projects since 2004 now collectively reduce sediment reaching Iowa's waters by 95,723 tons per year and phosphorus loading by 156,485 pounds per year.

TAKE THE WATERSHED PLUNGE WITH SWIM WORKSHOP

Join us this July at Springbrook Conservation Education Center for a workshop devoted to stream and watershed management.

The Stream and Watershed Integrated Management (SWIM) workshop is designed to train individuals who work with stream and watershed principles and practices.

It includes classroom presentations and field experiences with watershed and stream management professionals from Iowa State University, Iowa DNR, IDALS-DSC and USDA-NRCS.

For more information, visit www.iowadnr.gov/education/swim.html or contact Don Sievers at (641) 747-8383 (ext. 14) or at Don.Sievers@dnr.iowa.gov.

Registration forms are available on the website and are due by June 19. Workshop space is limited, so register early.

Online resources for watershed efforts

Turn to the Web for a wealth of information on all aspects of watershed improvement, from getting an effort started to technical tools and expertise.

Grants and other funding

<http://watershed.iowadnr.gov/grants.html>
www.iowaagriculture.gov/waterResources/projectApplicationRequest.asp
www.iowadnr.gov/water/nonpoint/nps5.html
www.iowaagriculture.gov/IWIRB.asp
www.iowadnr.gov/water/srf/index2.html

Resources for coordinators

<http://watershed.iowadnr.gov/coord.html>

Interactive mapping

www.iowadnr.gov/mapping/index.html

Water monitoring

www.iowater.net
<http://wqm.igsb.uiowa.edu/>

Public outreach

www.epa.gov/nps/toolbox/



REMSEN SOURCE WATER PROJECT PARTNERS

- City of Remsen
- Iowa DNR
- Local landowners
- Pheasants Forever
- Plymouth County
- Plymouth Soil and Water Conservation District
- Sioux Rivers Resource Conservation and Development
- USDA-NRCS



Planning key in source water project

Continued from page 1

check by assisting with controlled burns of the native grasses.

The DNR will continue to monitor the quality of the well water, and the community planning team will use nutrient and pest management practices on the plantings.

The team will also work to plug abandoned wells to prevent further groundwater contamination, and on outreach projects to keep the community involved.

In addition, the community planning team worked with several part-

ners to secure a Watershed Improvement Review Board grant (see page 8) and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loans to offset the costs of getting the source water project up and running.

As a result, the community can look forward to a future 70-acre outdoor classroom and improved drinking water, and pheasants will have a new preserve to call home.

"The source water protection plan offers so many benefits to this community," Ohrtman said. "It

all goes back to the groundwater assessment, careful planning and a long-term partnership between local, state and federal groups."



The area at left will soon be planted to native grasses to protect one of the drinking water wells that serves the town of Remsen.

Dan Cook photo

Iowa SRF: Additional funds for watershed projects, practices

The Iowa State Revolving Fund (SRF) provides low-interest loans for a wide variety of water quality projects, including soil and sediment control, manure management, septic system replacement, urban storm water management, wetland restoration and more.

Loans are made through participating local lenders. Eligible applicants include farmers, landowners, livestock producers, rural homeowners and watershed groups, as well as cities and counties. Applications are

accepted year-round. If you have a water quality project, we have a loan for you!

Call for "Green Infrastructure"

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the federal stimulus) presents a unique opportunity for Iowa communities to focus on watershed improvement.

Communities are invited to submit applications for projects that qualify as "green infrastructure." The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines

green infrastructure as practices that manage and treat stormwater and restore natural hydrology by infiltrating, evapotranspiring, and capturing and using storm water.

Projects will need to be under construction by February 2010 and must comply with environmental review and other federal requirements.

For more information, visit www.iowasrf.com or contact Patti Cale-Finnegan, DNR SRF Coordinator, at (515) 725-0498 or patti.cale-finnegan@dnr.iowa.gov.

2008 impaired waters data available

Visit the DNR Watershed Atlas interactive mapping site for a graphic look at the impaired waters list.
www.iowadnr.gov/mapping/index.html — click on "Watershed Atlas"

Stream histories draw people to project

A research project has turned into a major – but effective – public outreach effort for Michelle Turner in Jackson County. She's worked to identify as many small streams in the county as possible and has collected historical information on many of those creeks.

Turner has packaged and presented this information in a number of creative ways to spark residents' interest in the creeks and watershed improvement.

She has delivered a presentation to a number of local service clubs and other groups. She created a placemat with a county map on front and stream name histories on back that was used at the local Farm and Home Show, at luncheons for legislators and the SWCD, and that will be distributed to restaurants in the county.

While this project informs and educates locals about their backyard creeks, it has also moved them to action.

"During the talks I always point out the differences that can be seen in the streams – fish populations, rate of flow, flooding – then and now, and how conservation practices can help, or in some cases, harmed the water quality and quantity," she says. "I start my PowerPoint presentation with an

armchair tour of many of the streams, showing how beautiful our forgotten and overlooked streams are. Even locals are amazed at how picturesque their 'backyards' are."

A local neighborhood group has offered to pay to install stream name signs at bridge crossings along their creek. One landowner sparked by the project is planning to install a solar pump for his cattle this year. The local newspaper is running a story on backyard conservation, and a number of pieces have run on radio stations. The area historical society has asked for Turner's help on its new "ghost town" book.

Turner knew her audiences and how to reach them.

"This project worked well here because so many of the residents are third and fourth generation, and have personal ties to the histories," she says. "All in all, this has been an A-plus public relations tool."

Why did it work?

- It fits into a larger outreach and

DATES TO REMEMBER

March and April : Annual review meetings

April 1: 319/WPF/WSPF grant applications due

April 2-3: "Wetlands: Reinvesting in Iowa's Natural Capital" symposium, State Historical Building, Des Moines

project plan.

- It reaches the intended audiences.
- It moves those audiences to action.
- It helps meet project goals.
- It impacted project participation and perception.



Local Farm and Home Show display. Courtesy of Michelle Turner.

April symposium to explore wetlands

"Wetlands: Reinvesting in Iowa's Natural Capital"

April 2-3

State Historical Building, Des Moines

More info at: <http://www.iowastormwater.org/Portals/0/2009%20Workshops/Program%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

Conference Goals and Objectives:

- Restore the traditional water wealth of Iowa by striking a healthy balance between human industry and nature's strategies.
- Create awareness of the escalating costs associated with unbalanced water management.
- Empower landowners, community leaders, elected officials, design professionals, and environmental enthusiasts with the information necessary to maximize their water resources.
- Identify and encourage new and innovative funding sources for both public and private watershed restoration and flood prevention.

WIRB announces seven grant recipients

The Watershed Improvement Review Board (WIRB) has awarded more than \$2.36 million in grants to support seven projects that will improve water quality in the state.

The grant funds will be matched by recipients, who will provide more than \$5 million in local funding from to support these projects. As a result, \$7.43 million will be going to improve water quality throughout the state.

"These projects are a partnership between state and local organizations that are committed to improving Iowa's water quality," said Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey. "These projects will address runoff and drainage, erosion, municipal dis-

charge and a number of other issues that impact the state's waterways."

The approved projects have already completed watershed assessments that identified critical water resource areas and will focus on implementing specific water quality improvements.

The projects will start after grant agreements are signed between the applicants and WIRB.

Soil and water conservation districts, public water supply utilities, county conservation boards, cities, and local watershed improvement committees are eligible to apply for grants up to \$500,000.

WIRB is comprised of representatives from agriculture, drinking water

and wastewater utilities, environmental organizations, agribusiness, and the conservation community, along with two state senators and two state representatives.

Projects receiving WIRB grants:

- Competine Creek, Marion County
- DMACC Lake, Polk County
- Duck Creek, Scott County
- Remsen Source Water Protection, Plymouth County
- Sands Timber, Taylor County
- Staff and Beaver Creeks, Howard County
- Walnut Creek, Montgomery and Pottawattamie counties

More info:

www.iowaagriculture.gov/IWIRB.asp



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